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ENVIRONMENT		
TRANSPORT		
DIRECTOR		
TRANS	15 SEP 2010	
BMGT		
REFER 1	REFER 2	
ACK	REPLY	FILE

Sept 13th 2010

The Way Ahead

I am writing to put on record issues that would have been raised in the debate we could not have last week. It is addressed to you in your capacity as the interface we have with the appointing authority but I trust it will be shown to those (unknown to us) senior officers apparently making decisions about our way ahead which we feel are misguided and possibly misinformed as to what we are about.

As background I would confirm to you that prior to last weeks meeting two members not able to be present had said they thought we should revert to our original 6 meetings a year and several members had said that this years long summer break had left us dysfunctional. We had originally scheduled 5 meetings this year but dropped the summer one. This did mean that a number of pressing issues were neglected, indeed the annual report that by statute we are obliged to produce, is now so far out of date that the next one is almost due.

You will recall that I had suggested we could get by with only 5 meetings next year but spread more regularly through the year but when we opened the debate we were told in no uncertain terms that the issue had already been decided on high and the debate was stillborn.

Since the meeting several members have contacted me expressing considerable disquiet and questioning whether there is any point to their continuing on the Forum if they are not permitted sufficient time to effectively contribute. One member made a very interesting point. She said that it was almost as though the powers that be thought they were doing us a favour by facilitating our meetings. I have to agree with her comment that it is us that are doing the local authority a favour by giving up our time to assist them.

You don't have a need to reduce public spending, but you must beware false economies and our road works in reality cost very little to service. Round the table, members of the Forum bring an immense knowledge base to the assistance of the authority. They may be unpaid but are far from amateur.

The message has been made, not least under the banner of the 'Big Society' that more not less use should be made of the voluntary sector. I see our functions in several overlapping areas. We are to advise and assist the authority in maintaining and improving the rights of way network and open spaces but equally we are to assist with promoting the use of green infrastructure by the public and educating them as to how to appreciate what they will find there and how to behave there.

Walking, running and riding bring such important benefits in terms of addressing the health and safety issues facing this increasingly sedentary society that reducing our capacity to assist in promoting such activities would be a real false economy. In fact, investing in encouraging such everyday activities, for example through Walking for Health, would shave millions off the country's inactivity bill, saving a small fortune for the local NHS, in helping to cut down on obesity and inactivity related illnesses.

We cannot get through our agenda without having to rush some items and thereby not doing them justice and being restricted to just 4 meetings next year cannot help this. We cannot extend the meetings beyond two and a half hours because of the time people can get there from work and the time county hall closes but in any event I doubt peoples attention span could cope with longer.

It appears that we have no choice in the matter so I would ask that alternate meetings be provided by workshops and open forums for those who can get there and that whenever an emergency crops up you will organise get togethers all be they informal gatherings so they can address the issues in a timely fashion.

The image shows two handwritten marks in black ink. On the left is a stylized signature consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke. To the right of the signature is a simple checkmark, formed by a single diagonal stroke that curves at the top and bottom.

Roy Denney,
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Date: 5th November 2010
My ref: TK/LAF
Your ref:
Contact: Tony Kirk
Phone: 0116 3056270
Fax:
Email: Tony.Kirk@leics.gov.uk

Dear Mr Denney,

Leicestershire Local Access Forum – Way Ahead

Thank you for your letter regarding the frequency of Forum meetings. I must first apologise for the delay in getting back to you. As you will appreciate, the resources for supporting the work of the forum are split over more than one department and I have been trying to establish the full picture, including funding, before responding.

You will be aware of the recent changes in the location of the Rights of Way team. My role is as Group Manager for the Passenger Transport Unit. This area brings together not just walking and riding in a Rights of Way context but deals with the broader issues of all non motorised travel. This includes public transport, personalised travel and the encouragement of walking, cycling on the whole highways network. I look forward to working with the forum on the development of this area of work.

I should first put on record my thanks for the work that members provide in a voluntary capacity. The range and amount of work undertaken by the forum since its inception has been considerable. I also appreciate that a number of members disseminate and feed back information from the group to a much wider range of organisations throughout the county.

The County Council is faced with an unprecedented budgetary situation. Over the next four years, the authority will be required to make massive savings (currently estimated at over £90 million, but may be more). All areas of work are being scrutinised and very difficult decisions will have to be made. This work is ongoing and any commitments including the resources to the forum will be reviewed annually. However, to give some perspective the Head of Democratic Services has indicated that the number of Committee staff will be reducing by at least three posts which is more than 25%.

I can assure you that the authority wants to support the group now and into the future. You are quite correct to point out that the forum had been holding six meetings until this year. However, the group has only met four times this year. The proposed number of meetings for 2011 is the same number.

I note your helpful suggestion for workshops to precede meetings, when appropriate. This reduces the need for secretarial support and should allow for a number of issues to be developed outside the formal meeting. I believe at the last meeting this was considered a success.

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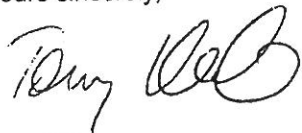
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Your comments regarding the importance of walking and riding are also shared by the authority. I know you have worked with officers on schemes set out in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and financed via the Local Transport Plan. The next Transport Plan consultation that you recently received continues to include a strong emphasis on the areas you set out, including physically active transport choices (cycling and walking) and the benefits of healthy travel. The fact that this area continues to receive focus will be in part due to the efforts of the forum to promote this area of work.

In the light of the challenges facing service provision I feel the provision of four meetings a year is reasonable. This compares with the statutory requirement for only two meetings. In addition, the meeting schedules have been amended to more regular periods. With the additional offer of workshops preceding some meetings I hope this is a practical way forward.

In the meantime, thank you and the members for your continuing support and efforts.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Kirk', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tony Kirk,
Group Manager,
Passenger Transport Unit.